Service charges in Gulf Embassies

3083. SHRI N.K. PREMACHANDRAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any guidelines have been presented to levy service changes in Gulf Embassies for the registration of birth and issuance of certain certificates;

(b) if so, the details thereof and whether Government are aware that there is widespread complaint that the service charge levied is exorbitant when compared to other neighbouring countries;

(c) wheher Government are in receipt of any representation from Government of Kerala to review the rate of service charge; and

(d) if so, Government's reaction thereto and the acton taken therein?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes.

(b) Fees for attestation of documents were rationalized and refixed in US$ and Euros with effect from 1st January, 2002, under the Diplomatic and Consular (Fees) Amendment Rules, 2001 .These rates are applicable globally and not restricted to the Indian Embassies in the Gulf region atone.

(c) Yes.

(d) The Government has taken note of the representation.

Payment of property tax by India in New York.

3084. SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that New York city Government has filed suit against India for property tax default;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the foreign countries pay property and other taxes to Government of India or cities where they own the properties;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) wheher they are exempted from payment of tax; if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) Yes.

(b) The New York City Government has filed a Suit in the Supreme Court of the State of New York, County of New York against the Permanent Mission of India (PMI) at New York to recover outstanding real propety taxes, other charges and interest thereon for the period 28-8-1985 to 31-1-2003. The claim is for a total of US$ 16,376,702.09 representing a Principal amount of US$ 4,876,542.20 and interest of US$ 11,500,159.89 as of 1-2-2003. The claim arises out of contention that portion of the Government of India owned PMI building were not used for tax-exempt diplomatic purposes but rather for taxable residential purposes. The Principal claim is on real estate taxes, elevator charges and for sidewalk repairs.

(c) Foreign misions do not pay properly and other taxes to Government of India in respect of the properties owned by them in India.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) Foreign missions are exempt from paying tax in respect of properties owned by them in India. The exeption is granted in terms of Article 23 and 34 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961.

Regional Passport Office Ahmedabad

3085. SHRI LALITBHAI MEHTA:
SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA:
Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Regional Passport Office at Ahmedabad, Gujarat is over burdenead resulting in inordinate delay in issuing passports;

(b) whether Government have recived any demand to open Regional Passport Offices at Rajkot and Surat; and

(c) the number of passports issued by Regional Passport Office at Ahmedabad during the last three years in Gujarat with a break up of the seven districts of Saurashtra area and a district of Kutch?